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ABSTRACT

These recommendations concerning the integration of students with and without disabilities in public schools begin with an operational definition of integration and a list of general parameters guiding successful integration. Recommendations are then offered in several areas, including: (1) training, which should be systematic, comprehensive, inclusive, multi-modal, and professional; (2) staff, who should have critical collaborative planning skills and skills in utilizing various service delivery models based on students' individual needs; (3) class size, which should be flexible based on students' needs and with consideration given to optimal proportions of students with and without disabilities; (4) curriculum, with modifications designed to meet individual needs and to facilitate integration of all students; and (5) a phase-in plan for systematically increased inclusion of students into general educational programs at all levels and in all schools. The paper concludes that successful integration requires multi-level restructuring, a commitment to share responsibility between general and special educators, and viewing the child as a part of a community. (JDD)

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Guidelines Regarding Integration of Students with Identified Special Education Needs

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If we have inadvertently left out any individual who gave input into these guidelines, we wish to thank them.

Introduction

The Charge

The Integration Task Force was created by the Superintendent of the Boston Public Schools to provide him with recommendations regarding the integration of students with and without disabilities in the school system. The recommendations were developed by attending members of the group through a series of meetings in which parent and professional representatives from the system and local university discussed issues and practices related to successful implementation of integration of students with and without disabilities. Additionally, a draft of the recommendations was sent out for comment to school and community members. Those written comments were reviewed and integrated into the final document.

Operational Definition

The Task Force recognized that much discussion exists in the field regarding definitions of integration, mainstreaming and full inclusion . The Task Force chose to be guided by the description of integration by Bilken, Lehr, Searl and Taylor (1987). This description is as follows:

> Integration is a broad term which refers to the opportunities for the student with a disability to have access to, inclusion in, and participation in all activities of the total school environment. Effective integration means planning and providing maximal opportunities for interactions between nondisabled students and their peers who have disabilities. These

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interactions can and should occur in a variety of settings and ways (p.11).

The Task Force also considers integration to be:

1. more than physical proximity of students with and without disabilities;

2. multi-level instruction occurring concurrently for individual students that is sensitive to children with a range of abilities and learning styles;

3. focused on the establishment of reciprocal relationships between students with and without disabilities; and

4. designed to facilitate the generalization of knowledge and skills by instructing students in the locations where critical skills are needed, not in isolated classes or therapy rooms.

Recognitions

Also providing guidance to the Task Force were a number of recognitions. The Task Force recognized that:

1. successful integration requires a commitment of regular and special education;

2. successful integration requires flexibility of all involved;

3. successful integration is achieved only through careful, systematic planning;

4. successful integration is achieved only when based on case-by-case decision making; and

5. components of integration are already occurring in some Boston public schools.

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Based on the aforementioned description of integration and recognitions, a series of recommendations was developed that related to several critical components. The critical components are summarized below and expanded in the subsequent sections.

1. Training - timely, systematic, comprehensive training for all parties affected by integration;

2. Staffing - staff selected with critical collaborative planning skills who utilize various service delivery models based on the individual needs of students;

3. Class size - flexibility in class size based on individual needs of students and with consideration given to optimal proportions of students with and without disabilities;

4. Curriculum - curricular modifications for both the students with and without disabilities which are designed to meet individual needs and to facilitate integration of all students;

5. Phase-in plan - a plan for increased inclusion of students into general education program that is systematic at all levels and in all schools.

Recommendations relative to each of these components are elaborated below.

Training

Training must have the following characteristics:

a. systematic - well planned and timely - occurring prior to implementation of integration efforts, and ongoing, with consideration being given to strategies for utilizing current local expertise and adding to that pool to assure longitudinal access to expertise.

b. comprehensive - includes content addressing attitudes, knowledge and skills related to integration. Additionally, it should reflect a recognition of the change in roles of special education and related service staff as movement occurs from a segregated,

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isolated instructional service delivery model to an integrated service delivery model.

c. inclusive - designed to include students with and without disabilities, parents of children with and without disabilities, general and special education teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, related service personnel, and all ancillary staff, including secretaries, custodians, cafeteria staff, and transportation personnel.

d. multi-modal - designed to include a variety of formats including site visitations, in-class consultation, as well as traditional group training sessions.

e. professional - presented in a manner that conveys the concept of professional development designed to enhance the participants as professional, not as obligatory training to meet the needs of a select group of individuals.

Staffing

Successful integration requires a shift in the roles of both general and special educators as well as related services personnel. It requires joint planning and collaboration, where in the past independent planning may have occurred. It requires consultation and indirect service provision where, in the past, only direct service was provided. It requires increased communication among school personnel and between school personnel and families.

The changes in roles must be accompanied by training to prepare individuals for the changes. It must also be accompanied by time for staff members to meet to accomplish the planning. Both must be the result of systematic planning and not left to circumstance.

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Models for Staffing

There is no one staffing model for integrating students with disabilities into general education that can be identified as the "best." It is recommended that a review of existing models be accomplished and that model selections be based on careful analysis and consideration. Brief descriptions of several models are discussed in this section and then followed up by a list of several factors to be considered in model selection and/or development.

MODELS

Co-teaching or team teaching - a regular education and special education teacher assigned to a class with children with and without disabilities for all or part of the day.

Consulting teacher integration specialist - special education teacher consults with general education teacher to assist in modifying curriculum for students with disabilities.

Consulting teacher and paraprofessional - paraprofessional assigned to class with students with disabilities; consulting teacher consults with general education teacher and paraprofessional to integrate student with disabilities.

CONSIDERATIONS

Needs of students - in some cases an individual aide assigned to a specific student may be essential to assure full integration of those students. In other cases, that staffing model would interfere with integration. Decisions must be individual.

Strengths of teachers - in some cases, general education teachers may possess the necessary skills to successfully implement integration and would not need additional consultation; in other cases it would be critical.

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Teaching styles - in some cases, teachers' instructional styles would not lend themselves to team teaching; in some cases, "teaming" between two teachers would not work, as successful teaming cannot be mandated. Decisions regarding staffing for an integrated student must take these factors into consideration. However, at no time should the needs of the teachers be placed above the needs of the students.

ONGOING STAFF SUPPORTS

With whatever model of staffing that is utilized, several things are considered to be essential to assure successful integration. These include:

1. Time for team members to meet with each other and with families on a regular and ongoing basis which are realized by creative solutions to shortages of "free time" during the school day.

2. Ongoing training designed to build and refine attitudes, knowledge and skills relative to the needs of individuals with disabilities and their integration.

3. Resources in the form of materials and support personnel with expertise in the instruction and integration of students with disabilities.

Curriculum

Integration must be more than mere physical placement of students in general education environments. Critical to each student's success is a clear specification, implementation and evaluation of that individual's educational program within the context of the general education environment in which each student is placed.

It is recommended that a major component of the transition to integrated programs for students with and without disabilities include the following:

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1. A review of regular curriculum - A variety of instructional content and methodologies exists in regular education. Within this array are a whole range of content and instructional procedures that can serve to facilitate integration, and likewise, serve to prohibit it.

A careful review of curricular approaches that facilitate integration (such as cooperative learning, mastery learning, computer assisted instruction, etc.) should be undertaken. Comprehensive ongoing training should be provided to system personnel to increase use of such successful strategies.

2. A review of special education curriculum - There is a broad range of curriculum adaptations and instructional methods utilized in special education. The IEP is the basic tool that identifies the focus of the interventions. The content of IEPs should reflect the skills necessary for an individual student to function in a social environment. Often, however, the content of IEPs is a reflection of the educational setting in which a student is placed. For example, it is rare to see objectives related to integration for students in substantially separate classes. And it is rare to see objectives related to community functioning for students with mild disabilities who are educated in resource room settings. The critical objectives are not included since they are not typical curriculum content in those settings, despite the fact that they should be considered goals for all students.

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To assure that the individual needs of students are met, attention must be paid to the development of functional, relevant IEPs that are independent of the setting. The Task Force recommends that systematic, ongoing inservice be provided for program planners in this area.

3. A review of curricular modification strategies designed to facilitate integration - Numerous strategies and decision making models for assuring curricular integration of students with individual education programs into regular education curriculum are emerging. Models such as those developed by Giangreco et al (1990) and Project Instepp (Jorgansen et al, 1990) which highlight guidelines to develop curriculum for integration should be the basis of training for all those responsible for facilitating the integration of students with disabilities into general education classes.

Phase-in Planning

While rapid movement towards integration of all students is seen as desirable, it is recognized by the Task Force that a phase-in model may have advantages to a hasty mandate for integration of students. Consequently, this Task Force makes the following recommendations:

1. A system wide, systematic phase-in plan should be developed. Included in that plan should be consideration of the selection of target schools, students and diversity of models.

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2. Encouragement should be provided to all schools to increase integration efforts. All schools should be required, as a part of its Annual Education Plan, to list specific strategies that will be implemented to promote integration and to better serve children with special needs in general education classrooms. All Zones should be encouraged to consider regular classroom placement as the first option for all children and to provide sound justification for alternative placements, rather than the converse.

3. Multi-level training related to issues and practices regarding integration should be a system priority in all zones and schools.

4. Current models of integration should be identified and supported to provide local demonstrations for system dissemination.

5. A specific time-line should be established with clear deadlines that assure systematic movement toward full inclusion of all students, as quickly as possible.

Conclusion

Successful integration will necessitate changes of many prevalent practices. It requires a shift in thinking from sole special education responsibility for education to a commitment to share responsibility between general and special educators. It requires multi-level restructuring, ranging from structural physical changes in the building to essential joint decision making. It also requires planning beyond classroom walls; it necessitates viewing the child as a part of a community which includes the classroom, the playground, the cafeteria, as well as the bus, extracurricular activities and the community at large.

The ultimate goal of integration is not mere placement in regular classes; this is just a vehicle for meeting the long term goal of unrestricted access to community living. It is only in

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integrated settings that students with and without disabilities can acquire the critical skills necessary to enable this access. It is only through a comprehensive, systematic process including the considerations in this report that the goal can be met.

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1 The Massachusetts Department of Education, Division of Special Education, is in the process of preparing a technical assistance paper entitle "A Focus on Integration Including Students of All Abilities to be published in 1991.